

God's Continued Protection and Encouragement for David

1 Samuel 23

1 Samuel 23 - "Then they told David, saying, "Look, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah, and they are robbing the threshing floors." ² Therefore David inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" And the LORD said to David, "Go and attack the Philistines, and save Keilah." ³ But David's men said to him, "Look, we are afraid here in Judah. How much more then if we go to Keilah against the armies of the Philistines?" ⁴ Then David inquired of the LORD once again. And the LORD answered him and said, "Arise, go down to Keilah. For I will deliver the Philistines into your hand." ⁵ And David and his men went to Keilah and fought with the Philistines, struck them with a mighty blow, and took away their livestock. So David saved the inhabitants of Keilah.

⁶ Now it happened, when Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David at Keilah, that he went down with an ephod in his hand. ⁷ And Saul was told that David had gone to Keilah. So Saul said, "God has delivered him into my hand, for he has shut himself in by entering a town that has gates and bars." ⁸ Then Saul called all the people together for war, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men. ⁹ When David knew that Saul plotted evil against him, he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod here." ¹⁰ Then David said, "O LORD God of Israel, Your servant has certainly heard that Saul seeks to come to Keilah to destroy the city for my sake. ¹¹ Will the men of Keilah deliver me into his hand? Will Saul come down, as Your servant has heard? O LORD God of Israel, I pray, tell Your servant." And the LORD said, "He will come down." ¹² Then David said, "Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul?" And the LORD said, "They will deliver you."

¹³ So David and his men, about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah and went wherever they could go. Then it was told Saul that David had escaped from Keilah; so he halted the expedition. ¹⁴ And David stayed in strongholds in the wilderness, and remained in the mountains in the Wilderness of Ziph. Saul sought him every day, but God did not deliver him into his hand. ¹⁵ So David saw that Saul had come out to seek his life. And David was in the Wilderness of Ziph in a forest. ¹⁶ Then Jonathan, Saul's son, arose and went to David in the woods and strengthened his hand in God. ¹⁷ And he said to him, "Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Even my father Saul knows that." ¹⁸ So the two of them made a covenant before the LORD. And David stayed in the woods, and Jonathan went to his own house.

¹⁹ Then the Ziphites came up to Saul at Gibeah, saying, "Is David not hiding with us in strongholds in the woods, in the hill of Hachilah, which is on the south of Jeshimon?" ²⁰ Now therefore, O king, come down according to all the desire of your soul to come down; and our part shall be to deliver him into the king's hand." ²¹ And Saul said, "Blessed are you of the LORD, for you have compassion on me. ²² Please go and find out for sure, and see the place where his hideout is, and who has seen him there. For I am told he is very crafty. ²³ See therefore, and take knowledge of all the lurking places where he hides; and come back to me with certainty, and I will go with you. And it shall be, if he is in the land, that I will search for him throughout all the clans of Judah."

²⁴ So they arose and went to Ziph before Saul. But David and his men were in the Wilderness of Maon, in the plain on the south of Jeshimon. ²⁵ When Saul and his men went to seek him, they told David. Therefore he went down to the rock, and stayed in the Wilderness of Maon. And when Saul heard that, he pursued David in the Wilderness of Maon. ²⁶ Then Saul went on one side of the mountain, and David and his men on the other side of the mountain. So David made haste to get away from Saul, for Saul and his men were encircling David and his men to take them. ²⁷ But a messenger came to Saul, saying, "Hurry and come, for the Philistines have invaded the land!" ²⁸ Therefore Saul returned from pursuing David, and went against the Philistines; so they called that place the Rock of Escape. ²⁹ Then David went up from there and dwelt in strongholds at En Gedi."

Background Notes

While David and his men were hiding from King Saul in the strongholds of the Judean wilderness, David heard that the Philistines had attacked the border town of Keilah and were plundering the threshing floors. This meant that all the good grain would be stolen soon after it was threshed, and the people would starve. So, David inquired of the Lord twice, asking whether he should go and attack the Philistines, and the Lord said, "Yes, go, and you will defeat the Philistines."

How did the Lord communicate this to David? The key is in verse 6: "*Now it happened, when Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David at Keilah, that he went down with an ephod in his hand.*" The ephod of the high priest was an apron-like garment that was worn in conjunction with the breastplate. There were twelve precious stones that represented the twelve tribes of Israel on the breastplate. Also, there were the "Urim and Thummim" stones that were used (in some unknown way) to determine God's will. We don't know all the details, but by using the Urim and the Thummim, the high priest was able to determine "Yes" or "No" answers from the Lord for such questions as, "Should we go fight the Philistines?"

After David defeated the Philistines with a great slaughter and delivered the people of Keilah (v5), David again called for Abiathar, the priest, to bring the ephod. "*When David knew that Saul plotted evil against him, he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod here."* David asked the Lord whether the men of Keilah would betray him into the hands of King Saul, and the Lord said, "Yes, they will betray you." Can you believe it? The very people whom David had just delivered from the Philistines were about to turn against him and betray him to Saul!

Here again David is a spiritual picture of our Lord Jesus. The Lord was rejected by the very people that He came to save -- and they betrayed Him as well! Have you ever been betrayed by a friend or by people that you were trying to help? It happens -- and when it happens, it hurts. But the Lord understands our hurts, and He will be there to comfort us and deliver us.

Doctrinal Points

1. The Lord provides protection during times of trouble.

In verse 13 we read that David escaped from Keilah, and Saul gave up his evil pursuit temporarily. God was protecting David. However, Saul didn't give up for long, because verse 14 says that while David was in the strongholds of the wilderness, Saul sought him every day. But God did not "deliver David into Saul's hand." The Lord provides protection during times of trouble.

When David left Keilah, he moved about 12 miles southeast to the wilderness of Ziph, and then went on about 5 more miles to the wilderness of Maon. Here again, the people decided to betray David to King Saul. This time it was the Ziphites. Probably the people who were willing to betray David were afraid that Saul would annihilate them, as he had done to the community of priests at Nob. Remember that they had withheld knowledge of David's whereabouts from King Saul.

But God protected David. Just as Saul had almost surrounded David and his men, an urgent message came to Saul telling him that the Philistines had invaded the land. So, Saul had to return from pursuing David and, therefore, they called that place the "Rock of Escape" -- for obvious reasons.

Now do you think that David's escape was all by chance or coincidence? Certainly not! God was in control! The Lord provides protection during times of trouble. Nahum 1:7 says, "*The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who trust in Him.*" David found that to be true, and we can, too.

Now the fact that the Lord provides protection doesn't mean we won't have troubles. It doesn't mean that Christians will never be martyred for their faith, or that Christians will never die or be killed. Troubles can come from circumstances or from people. They can be physical troubles or emotional troubles. But when troubles come, we should look to the Lord for protection. Don't look to yourself, and don't look to people who may betray you, but to the Lord alone! The Lord provides protection during times of trouble.

2. The Lord provides encouragement during times of trouble.

The fact that Jonathan was able to find David while King Saul could not find him is another indication that God was protecting David. In verse 16, Jonathan encouraged David in God. Jonathan may have brought food, and he certainly brought news -- but more than that, Jonathan encouraged David! He told David not to be afraid, because it was just a matter of time before God delivered him. Jonathan encouraged David in the Lord.

The Lord provides encouragement during times of trouble. Notice the things about God that bring encouragement during times of trouble. Not material possessions, or popularity, or pleasure. No, it's the knowledge of who God is. It's the assurance that He cares for us, and that He is control of the situation. These are the things that bring encouragement!

These are the truths that we should bring to people who are hurting and who are in a time of trouble. Often a passage from the Word of God has comforted and encouraged me in a time of trouble! And it is often through the act of sharing Scripture that we can bring encouragement to others during times of trouble.

Everybody see the lesson? As God used Jonathan to encourage David in the Lord in David's day of trouble, so God can use us to encourage others in Him when they are going through a time of trouble. The Lord provides encouragement in times of trouble.

Practical Application

Don't assume that every "opportunity" is from the Lord.

Look at what King Saul said when he found out that David had fortified himself at Keilah (v7): "*God has delivered him into my hand, for he has shut himself in by entering a town that has gates and bars.*" Saul thought, "What an opportunity! It must be from the Lord!" So, he proceeded to make plans to besiege Keilah. How wrong could Saul have been?

And look at what Saul said to the Ziphites (v21) when they were willing to betray David: "*Blessed are you of the LORD, for you have compassion on me.*" How blind and selfish and wrong Saul was!

And yet there are people like that today -- even Christians! They assume that every opportunity, or any so-called "open door" that happens to be in line with their way of thinking, must be "from the Lord." They sometimes assume this, even if it means the "opportunity from the Lord" goes against the clear teaching of Scripture, and that other people will be hurt in the process.

How often the Lord is wrongly given "credit" for all kinds of mistakes that believers make -- even divorce and other major incorrect decisions. Listen, the devil can provide all kinds of opportunities and open doors for you to do your own will.

Don't assume that every "opportunity" is from the Lord!